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AMERICAN BAPTISTS AND EVANGELISM

Extracts from an Interview of Dr. Jitsuo Morikawa
by the Editor of "Crusader".

EDITOR: There is some feeling abroad in the denomination that the theological basis for evangelism is shifting under your leadership. For instance, one of your staff members recently wrote:

> "Somehow we have reduced the dimensions of the Christian claim. We have taken the earliest Christian affirmation, 'Jesus Christ is Lord', a confession which expresses the exultant sweep and cosmic scope of God's deed, and substituted for it the pietistic diminutive, 'I accept Jesus as personal Savior'. Though the latter phrase is insisted on most tenaciously by those who claim to be closest to the Bible, the phrase itself never appears in the New Testament, and there is little scriptural justification for it. It reduces the astounding claims of the Christian message to the manageable dimensions of an inward individualism."
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> - Harvey Cox, Andover Newton Bulletin
> June, 1960, page 28.

Many Baptists began the Christian life by accepting Jesus Christ as personal Savior and then, by what used to be called "growth in grace", progressively acknowledged and practiced the Lordship of Christ over all phases of their life. If this is not still the basis for evangelism, what is?

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MORIKAWA: The familiar expression 'I accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior' has the merit of claiming the Saviorhood of Jesus Christ, and of emphasizing the personal reality of faith and the determining place of decision. Baptists have rightly claimed that membership in the church requires a personal confession of faith expressed through baptism. And we indeed affirm Jesus Christ as personal Savior.

But as the basic statement of faith we have some anxiety over this phrase for several reasons. (1) While the statement emphasizes the valid place of personal decision, it fails to express the prior and primary fact to which the human response is subordinate, namely, the glorious, cosmic fact that 'Jesus Christ is Lord'. (2) It fails to acknowledge 'the exultant sweep and cosmic scope of God's deed', a reality which is not at the mercy of our response or disobedience, but a fact which God has established in the risen Christ whether we acknowledge it or not. (3) It excludes the world scope of God's redemptive action, and rather than exulting in what God has done and is doing for the whole world, takes comfort in what God has done for oneself alone. This expresses a solitary and private faith as though salvation were exclusively an experience between the individual human soul and God. Biblical faith is always corporate and social. It is in the context of the 'two or three', the community of faith, that a person experiences the meaning of his own new life in Christ.

This is not to say that the person's decision does not make every difference! Until his decision he was living a lie, denying his true self, blind to what he is by virtue of what God has done. He was like an heir unaware of his inheritance, living like a pauper. He was like an acquitted prisoner living in prison, unaware of his new freedom. By his decision he responded in faith and obedience, entering into the new relationship with God and with his fellow men. Public expression of one's faith and decision should from the very outset be (1) a joyous confession and personal acknowledgment of Jesus Christ, the Savior, as Lord "...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"; and (2) a declaration of commitment in obedience to Christ's Lordship, "for to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." (Rom. 14:9)

It is the mission of the church faithfully to declare the whole of this good news. Those who respond will find themselves in the way of 'growth in grace', to the praise of God's glory.

EDITOR: Rightly or wrongly, many feel that the new evangelism is little interested in traditional evangelistic methods such as 'special meetings', visitation evangelism, and Decision Day in the Sunday school. Some have noted that the former area directors of evangelism, who specialized in visitation campaigns, are not with us any more. Will you comment on these things?

MORIKAWA: I cannot speak for all whom you identify with the 'new evangelism', but our divison is not only 'interested in traditional evangelism' as enumerated, but incorporates these methods as an

integral part of our total evangelistic ministry. They constitute an important part of each year's program of the Baptist Jubilee Advance. While the so-called new dimensions of witness in life and work, such as church-in-world conferences and study groups, witness through the arts, and the church in the home, are necessarily receiving particular attention and interpretation, they by no means replace methods in long use.

Visitation evangelism has become a recognized and widely used method, which has permeated our convention. The division develops and distributes instructional literature for visitation evangelism, with guidance for pastors and evangelism committees in their training of visitors in preparation for the Schools of Evangelism and Special Evangelistic Effort. Direction is given by strong staffs in state conventions and city societies, with whom the national Division of Evangelism maintains a close cooperative relationship. Under these circumstances, it was our conviction that a national field staff specializing solely in visitation evangelism is not as urgent as it once was. The decision, therefore, was to attempt a more inclusive leadership, to explore and pursue additional emphases on evangelism. It has been the function of the present staff to (1) probe the frontiers of evangelism today, through study and experimental leadership; (2) to meet the need for significant theological-practical literature in evangelism; and (3) to create national evangelism program and resources for the churches, particularly through the Baptist Jubilee Advance, in its annual special emphases.

EDITOR: We are hearing a great deal about the 'ministry of the laity', 'vocational evangelism', and 'the church in the world'. Haven't Baptists always preached that lay persons should be 'soul winners'; that the best contacts were those with whom we had jobs or interests in common, and that evangelism must move out of the sanctuaries of our churches and into the 'highways and byways'? What is so new about all this?

MORIKAWA: It is new only in the sense that the time has come for Baptists to move beyond mere verbal affirmation of these ideas and actually live them out. While we have consistently said that the church must witness in the 'highways and byways', what we have actually done is train our laymen to serve in the church, which of course is important. While we have said that all are priests and ministers and that the ministry of the church is the ministry of the whole people of God, what we have done has been to equate the ministry with the pastor, training laymen as his helpers to serve within the fellowship, and not to train and educate the laymen sufficiently to be ministers in the world. Christ gathers his people for worship and fellowship, in order to renew, support, and strengthen them to be his witnesses in the world in which they are scattered in places of occupation and other secular activity, and where they will find Him also actively present and at work. 'Vocational evangelism' or 'church-in-the-world' does not mean

that we take Christ into the factory or simply bring a spiritual accent into the secular world. We do bring into it the great news that Christ is already in the world, at work in the office, on the assembly line, in the courtroom. We bring to it our witness to the glorious truth that the gospel is concerned not only with 'religious' and 'spiritual' needs of man as something separable from other needs, but with the total breadth of human life. Christ is redeeming men, not only in terms of their inner spirit of life after death, but also in terms of their total involvement in the world in relation to their work and family, their neighborhood and nation. Vocational evangelism is bearing witness to Christ where He actually is, in the midst of the world of work and play, of toil and rest, calling men to respond to Himself, in obedience to his rule over them. It can become our greatest joy to point to him as the redeeming Lord, and it should be our most urgent desire to make him known to all men.

EDITOR: Some believe that your staff tends to downgrade what has come to be called 'churchmanship' (training the laity for service as deacons, trustees, choir members, ushers, etc.). Do you feel that such activities and training are still important in the life of the church?

MORIKAWA: Our vigorous stress on the ministry of the church in the world is a valid one, and one for which recovery is most urgent. But the utmost caution must be exercised in stressing the church in dispersion to the exclusion or downgrading of the church gathered. The gathering and scattering is a rhythm essential to the nature of the church. The church is gathered out of the world for worship and fellowship, to be nurtured with the Word and ordinances in order to be sent out into the world as salt and light.
The work of the deacons, trustees, church school teachers, etc. is terribly important. They are indispensable to the life of the church. But as the question implies, we have fallen into an extremely narrow view of 'churchmanship' so that we virtually equate it with what laymen and laywomen do in the housekeeping and ecclesiastical functions within the church. Actually, the primary responsibility of the churchman is to witness in the world, for his is the church in the world. The roles of the deacon and trustee and the various officers of the church, therefore, need to be redefined. If the church exists for the sake of its mission in the world, then, to prepare and send forth the church into the world must become the purpose of every office and officer and every organization in the church.

EDITOR: Granting that numerical results are often illusory and highly deceptive, do you not think that a church which is genuinely evangelistic in the finest sense of the word will normally experience growth which will be reflected in statistical tables?

MORIKAWA: I have no aversion to numbers or statistics! "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." While we believe we should not set goals and calculate how

many will confess Christ, we can and will work with persistent purpose toward increasing the number of witnesses and evangelists, and the occasions and arenas of witness.
But I do have an aversion for statistics when numbers and growth become so paramount as to sacrifice the demanding nature of the gospel by eliminating the word of prophetic judgment on the most cherished idols of American culture. When the church is fearlessly prophetic, calling for repentance of our most cherished sins and the surrender of our most chronic prejudice and pride, it may be that just as in an earlier day many will "walk no more with Him". Ultimately we do not determine the results. They are in God's hands. But every Christian, every evangelist, prays and works toward the response and obedience of the whole world to their sovereign Lord and Savior. His call is to be faithful to this urgent mission.

EDITOR: What are some of the significant accomplishments thus far of the Baptist Jubilee Advance? What else do you hope will be achieved?

MORIKAWA: I can scarcely be a good judge by virtue of my involvement. But since the BJA is a corporate concern of the whole denomination and its leadership is shared by many, it would not seem presumptuous to assess the current program.
When only one of the five years of the BJA has been completed, obviously visible results are relatively meagre; but already some significant things are taking place. (1) Evangelism is becoming a live question in the total life of the denomination. (2) Close collaboration between the Division of Evangelism and centers of theological education enriches the ministry of evangelism. (3) The Division of / Evangelism worked cooperatively in the Mission to the Academic Community, with some significant results. A final report of this will be available in the near future. (4) The BJA is bringing to dramatic focus the truth that evangelism is not the proprietory interest of a single division, but the central purpose of every agency of the denomination. (5) Through the BJA the Division of Evangelism is privileged to work closely with every agency in the denomination, thus involving the whole family in leadership, each division and agency making its own unique contribution. (6) Departments of Christian Education and Evangelism in the state conventions and city societies are giving vigorous leadership in the BJA. The laity are involved in serious theological discipline in the Schools of Evangelism, wrestling with the nature of the gospel and the church, and their relation to evangelism. (8) Pilots on 'Church-in-World' conferences and study groups, bringing together persons sharing a common secular involvement-politicians, industrial workers, teachers, insurance men, etc.-to consider what it means to witness in their daily work and world, have proved very hopeful. (9) The central thrust and program for each of the five years of the BJA are all in advanced stages of preparation through able committees of responsible and representative American Baptists. (10) The BJA offers a strategic opportunity for planning and conversation between seven Baptist bodies of North America.

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In the setting of these corporate developments, evidence of change in persons comes increasingly, through letter or personal testimony. Expressions from persons sharing in our experimental church-in-world conferences and study groups can be summarized: "We are new Christians since the church-in-world conference." New insight into what it means to be a witness in the world is coming to lay people; and on the part of pastors, new understanding of their central task as that of preparing their people for ministry in the world.

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Dr. Jitsuo Morikawa is the secretary of the Division of Evangelism for the Home Mission Societies and the Baptist Jubilee Advance leader. He was interviewed by Paul C. Allen, editor of "Crusader". The interview appeared in "Crusader" January 1961, pp. 8-10. With kind permission.